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SUBJECT: National Standing Committee on TIP Reflects on 2009 and hopes for improved engagement in 2010

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: In a December 10 meeting with the Political Counselor, Colonel Le Van Chuong, the chair of Vietnam's coordinating agency on trafficking, National Committee 130, reviewed his country's efforts over the past year to combat human trafficking. The Ministry of Public Security reported that in 2009, Vietnam focused on a) improving the capacity of its ongoing anti-trafficking programs, b) expanding the legal definition of trafficking to include men, c) working to improve bilateral relationships with its neighbors, and d) beginning the process of developing the next National Action Plan on Human Trafficking for 2011-2020. NC-130 estimated that in 2009, 250 victims had been rescued through police operations, some coordinated with foreign governments, and approximately 500 victims had been received at the borders or through diplomatic channels. MPS also reported 350 trafficking cases and the arrest of 500 suspects. In 2010, Vietnam intends to focus on labor export, foreign marriages and expanded TIP awareness programs. Key legislative goals in 2010 include the passage of a comprehensive law on trafficking to supersede current piecemeal legislative efforts and approval of a proposal before the National Assembly to ratify the UN Convention on Transnational Organized Crime. Chuong stated that Vietnam had studied the TIP Report and welcomed further engagement with the United States. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) On December 10, PolCouns and the Poloff responsible for TIP reporting and advocacy met with Colonel Le Van Chuong, the head of Vietnam's National Committee 130 (NC-130), a national-level steering committee headed by the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) that is responsible for coordinating the government's anti-trafficking activities. Chuong emphasized that NC-130 met with USG officials more frequently than with any other country to discuss trafficking in persons, an indication he said of his government's desire to work with the U.S. government. He reaffirmed that Vietnam remained committed to combating trafficking -- from the grassroots to the national level -- and said that NC-130 greatly appreciated the U.S. government's continuing interest and concern.

¶3. (SBU) Chuong said TIP remained a complicated and challenging issue for Vietnam and cited poverty, high unemployment, and widespread gender inequality as factors that left many poor Vietnamese vulnerable to trafficking. He said that economic development, together with legal reform, awareness-raising efforts (particularly in rural communities), improved victim assistance, and enhanced regional and international cooperation, would help address the problem. Like other GVN officials, Chuong also pointed to "foreign influences" as a source of much of the problem, noting that increasing regional and international integration had contributed to trafficking, particularly in the form of fake foreign marriage brokers, trafficking to China, and export labor exploitation.

2009 TIP Highlights: Legal Reform

¶4. (SBU) Colonel Chuong emphasized efforts this year to make

several important changes to Vietnam's legal code to address human trafficking this year. First, in June, the National Assembly approved an amendment to Article 119 that broadened the definition of human trafficking to include men, a move he stressed would enable men to make use of victim support services. In July, the government introduced a new regulation designed to prevent fraud in foreign marriages. And in October, Deputy Prime Minister (and Politburo member) Truong Vinh Trong chaired an extensive review of the five-year implementation of its National Plan of Action on the Trafficking of Women and Children (reftel). Twenty-five embassies and international organizations were present at that event. Chuong said the Ministry of Justice was still working on Vietnam's comprehensive law on human trafficking, which he hoped would be presented to the National Assembly for passage in 2010.

15. (SBU) In addition to legal reform, Chuong said Vietnam also improved its regional cooperation efforts, noting that MPS and the Ministry of Defense's Border Guards developed a mechanism to exchange information and coordinate the investigations and arrests of suspects in their efforts to fight against organized crime. Thailand and Vietnam held a seminar this year to develop an implementation plan based on their 2008 bilateral agreement and on December 3, Cambodia and Vietnam also signed a bilateral agreement to standardize procedures for returning victims. With an estimated sixty percent of Vietnam's trafficking victims going to China, Vietnam is working to build better relationships with their Chinese counterparts in order to combat this serious problem involving both countries. Chuong highlighted an April 2009 meeting with Chinese

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police in Guangxi province as one example of enhanced cross-border efforts, and said a bilateral agreement with China is currently being negotiated. He expects it will be signed by the Prime Minister in 2010. (Note: During an October visit to the border provinces of Cao Bang and Lang Son, Poloff met with MPS officials in the provincial capitals and at the border, who emphasized that enhanced cooperation with China has already begun, with provincial law-enforcement officers from both sides meeting regularly to discuss coordination. End note.) Vietnam has also been working with Laos, Cambodia and China to establish better networks for information sharing, including a tri-country hotline border guards can use to collect and share TIP information. Chuong said Vietnam also continues to work closely with INGOs on TIP-related projects.

16. (SBU) Chuong said Vietnam's improved anti-TIP efforts have led to the investigation this year of over 350 trafficking cases, with the arrest of 500 suspects. (Note: We have requested prosecution figures. End note.) He estimated that 250 victims, mostly from China and Cambodia have been rescued in police operations, some in conjunction with coordinated police actions. Approximately 500 victims had been received at the borders or through diplomatic channels, of which 100 were from Malaysia, Korea and Singapore. Asked about internal trafficking, Chuong acknowledged there was a problem, but responded that much of it remains hidden and related to prostitution and the tourism industries.

Looking forward to 2010

17. (SBU) Looking ahead, Chuong said NC-130 would review current projects related to public awareness, victim identification and reintegration, as well as the legal mechanism to implement the next National Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking of Women and Children (2011-2020), which is the GVN's blue print for anti-TIP efforts. NC-130 would also continue working on bilateral issues and agreements, such as the one pending with China, Chuong said. NC-130 intended to submit a comprehensive law on TIP to the National Assembly, Chuong said, adding that the National Assembly would also consider the UN International Convention on Trafficking in Persons. Chuong stated that NC-130 intended to give special attention to trafficking as it relates to export labor, acknowledging USG concerns in this area.

A Nod to USG Efforts

¶8. (SBU) Chuong referred to the 2009 TIP report and U.S. criminal code several times during the discussion and identified potential areas of cooperation between Vietnam and the United States. He requested that the USG provide Vietnam with TIP success stories and best practices from countries in similar circumstances, and pledged to continue frank exchanges on how best to combat trafficking. Chuong expressed the Vietnamese government's appreciation for training efforts such as the November ILEA Bangkok training on human trafficking, to which Vietnam sent six officers, and an upcoming training in Roswell, New Mexico regarding law enforcement management.

¶9. (SBU) Comment: Our NC-130 interlocutors were collegial, informative and highly interested in exchanging information, a positive sign that our outreach efforts are paying off. NC-130's wish list presents a window of opportunity to positively influence Vietnam's anti-TIP activities. End Comment.

¶10. (U) This cable was coordinated with ConGen HCMC.  
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